

# BLACKS

*Gwendolyn Brooks*

THE DAVID COMPANY, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Baker

88 1088

PS 3503 R7244 A6 1987

Second Printing, September 1987  
Third Printing, January 1988

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Some of the material in this compilation has been previously published by Harper and Row, New York, under the following titles: *Maud Martha*, *The Bean Eaters*, *In the Mecca*, *Annie Allen*, *A Street in Bronzeville* and *The World of Gwendolyn Brooks*.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 86-72732  
I.S.B.N.: 0-944191-00-2

For information address  
The David Company  
P.O. Box 19355  
Chicago, Illinois 60619



To the Memory  
of My Parents,  
David and Keziah Brooks

*Riot*

## RIOT

### A Poem in Three Parts

*A riot is the language of the unheard.*

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

John Cabot, out of Wilma, once a Wycliffe,  
all whitebluerose below his golden hair,  
wrapped richly in right linen and right wool,  
almost forgot his Jaguar and Lake Bluff;  
almost forgot Grandtully (which is The  
Best Thing That Ever Happened to Scotch); almost  
forgot the sculpture at the Richard Gray  
and Distelheim; the kidney pie at Maxim's,  
the Grenadine de Beouf at Maison Henri.

Because the "Negroes" were coming down the street.

Because the Poor were sweaty and unpretty  
(not like Two Dainty Negroes in Winnetka)  
and they were coming toward him in rough ranks.  
In seas. In windsweep. They were black and loud.  
And not detainable. And not discreet.

Gross. Gross. "Que tu es grossier!" John Cabot

itched instantly beneath the nourished white  
that told his story of glory to the World.  
"Don't let It touch me! the blackness! Lord!" he  
whispered to any handy angel in the sky.

But, in a thrilling announcement, on It drove  
and breathed on him: and touched him. In that breath  
the fume of pig foot, chitterling and cheap chili,  
malign, mocked John. And, in terrific touch, old  
averted doubt jerked forward decently,  
cried "Cabot! John! You are a desperate man,  
and the desperate die expensively today."

John Cabot went down in the smoke and fire  
and broken glass and blood, and he cried "Lord!  
Forgive these niggahs that know not what they do."

## THE THIRD SERMON ON THE WARPLAND

*Phoenix:*

*"In Egyptian mythology,  
a bird which lived for five hundred  
years and then consumed itself in fire,  
rising renewed from the ashes."*

— Webster

The earth is a beautiful place.  
Watermirrors and things to be reflected.  
Goldenrod across the little lagoon.

The Black Philosopher says  
"Our chains are in the keep of the keeper  
in a labeled cabinet  
on the second shelf by the cookies,  
sonatas, the arabesques . . .  
There's a rattle, sometimes.  
You do not hear it who mind only  
cookies and crunch them.

You do not hear the remarkable music— 'A  
Death Song For You Before You Die.'  
If you could hear it  
you would make music too.  
The blackblues."

West Madison Street.  
In "Jessie's Kitchen"  
nobody's eating Jessie's Perfect Food.  
Crazy flowers  
cry up across the sky, spreading  
and hissing **This is**  
it.

The young men run.  
They will not steal Bing Crosby but will steal  
Melvin Van Peebles who made Lillie  
a thing of Zampoughi a thing of red wiggles and trebles  
(and I know there are twenty wire stalks sticking out  
of her head  
as her underfed haunches jerk jazz.)

A clean riot is not one in which little rioters  
long-stomped, long-straddled, BEANLESS  
but knowing no Why  
go steal in hell  
a radio, sit to hear James Brown  
and Mingus, Young-Holt, Coleman, John,  
    on V.O.N.  
and sun themselves in Sin.

However, what  
is going on  
is going on.

Fire.

That is their way of lighting candles in the darkness.  
A White Philosopher said  
"It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness."  
    These candles curse—  
inverting the deeps of the darkness.

GUARD HERE, GUNS LOADED.

The young men run.  
The children in ritual chatter  
scatter upon  
their Own and old geography.

The Law comes sirening across the town.

A woman is dead.  
Motherwoman.  
She lies among the boxes  
(that held the haughty hat, the Polish sausages)  
in newish, thorough, firm virginity  
as rich as fudge is if you've had five pieces.  
Not again shall she  
partake of steak  
on Christmas mornings, nor of nighttime  
chicken and wine at Val Gray Ward's  
nor say  
of Mr. Beetley, Exit Jones, Junk Smith  
nor neat New-baby Williams (man-to-many)  
"He treat me right."

That was a gut gal.

"We'll do an us!" yells Yancey, a twittering twelve.  
"Instead of your deathintheafternoon,  
kill 'em, bull!  
kill 'em, bull!"

The Black Philosopher blaes  
"I tell you, **exhaustive** black integrity  
would assure a blackless America. . . ."

Nine die, Sun-Times will tell  
and will tell too  
in small black-bordered oblongs "Rumor? check it  
at 744-4111."

A Poem to Peanut.  
"Cooooool!" purrs Peanut. Peanut is  
Richard — a Ranger and a gentleman.  
A Signature. A Herald. And a Span.  
This Peanut will not let his men explode.  
And Rico will not.  
Neither will Sengali.  
Nor Bop nor Jeff, Geronimo nor Lover.  
These merely peer and purr,  
and pass the Passion over.  
The Disciples stir  
and thousandfold confer  
with ranging Rangemen;  
mutual in their "Yeah! —  
this AIN'T all upinheah!"

“But WHY do These People offend **themselves?**” say they  
who say also “It’s time.  
It’s time to help  
These People.”

Lies are told and legends made.  
Phoenix rises unafraid.

The Black Philosopher will remember:  
“There they came to life and exulted,  
the hurt mute.  
Then it was over.

The dust, as they say, settled.”

AN ASPECT OF LOVE,  
ALIVE IN THE ICE AND FIRE

LaBohem Brown

In a package of minutes there is this We.  
How beautiful.  
Merry foreigners in our morning,  
we laugh, we touch each other,  
are responsible props and posts.

A physical light is in the room.

Because the world is at the window  
we cannot wonder very long.

You rise. Although  
genial, you are in yourself again.  
I observe  
your direct and respectable stride.  
You are direct and self-accepting as a lion  
in Afrikan velvet. You are level, lean,  
remote.



There is a moment in Camaraderie  
when interruption is not to be understood.  
I cannot bear an interruption.  
This is the shining joy;  
the time of not-to-end.

On the street we smile.  
We go  
in different directions  
down the imperturbable street.

*Family Pictures*